

The Bible in One Message

Typically, when I preach a message, I encourage you to open your Bibles to a particular verse or a passage, and then I try to explain what it says and what it means. I often deal with a short passage, perhaps a verse or two or an entire paragraph, maybe even a whole chapter.

Perhaps you've heard a message on an entire book of the Bible, maybe a short one like Philemon or Jude.

But have you ever heard a message on the entire Bible? That's what I plan to do today—preach on the entire Bible.

The Bible is a big book. It contains 66 separate books written by about 40 different authors across a span of about 1600 years. Plus, it's not presented in chronological order. So it's get lost in the details. The basic ideas are rather obvious, but how it all fits together can be rather unclear.

So it's helpful for us to get an overview of the whole thing, a summary of the entire Bible. Once we see the big picture, we can see how the smaller parts fit in.

It's like the picture on the puzzle box; we need to see the big picture before we understand all the little pieces.

Today I want to give a summary of the contents of the Bible. I'm going to try to explain the major ideas in the Bible under 10 headings all starting with "C." And the information we find in each section is very important; these main ideas tell us a lot about our world and about ourselves.

Most of this will be review for many of us. But I think it's beneficial for us to consider the whole sweep of the biblical narrative in one sitting. After that, we'll consider the main point of it all; what does it all mean? What does it all point to?

We'll begin where the Bible begins—"in the beginning."

I. Creation

- A. The first words of the Bible are, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The first chapters of Genesis tell us a number of very significant things:

- B. There is a God. The first words of the Bible assert God's existence.
- C. The reason things exist is that God brought them into existence. He spoke, and they came into existence *ex nihilo*.
- D. The material universe had a beginning. God existed before everything else, and then he brought the world into being; he spoke it into existence.
- E. God is above and beyond the universe; he is not part of the creation. God works in creation but he's not part of it.
- F. Everything God made was good. The original condition of creation was very good. It was exactly what God intended.
- G. And we find that God made man in his own image.
 - 1. Man shares a personal, moral, and spiritual resemblance to God. Man is God's representative on earth.
 - 2. The image of God in man also means that human life has value and purpose and dignity. We did not evolve from the primordial soup. God made mankind by a direct act of his will.

II. Corruption

Genesis 3:6 *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*

- A. Satan was the first sinner. He said, "I will exalt myself above the throne of God," but God cast him out of heaven.
- B. Satan was the first tempter. He tempted Eve and she gave in. Adam joined his wife in sin and thereby plunged the entire race into sin.

Romans 5:12 *... through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned*
- C. What is sin? It's disobeying our creator. Man is sinful by birth and by choice.

1 John 3:4 *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*

- D. God cursed Satan, mankind, and the entire creation because of sin. We suffer from our own sins, the sins of others, and from natural disasters. Disease and death permeate our world because of sin.

Rom 8:22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.

- E. Much of the abuse, pain, and suffering in the world is due to man's corruption. Evil people do wicked things.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

III. Catastrophe

Genesis 6:5 Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

- A. Man became more and more sinful, and God determined to judge the earth by means of a world-wide flood.
- B. God spoke to Noah and he prepared a boat to protect humans and animals through the flood.
- C. The rains began, and the flood prevailed on the earth for a little over a year. The only humans to survive were Noah and his family.

IV. Confusion

- A. It didn't take too many generations after the flood for the population of the earth to corrupt itself again.
- B. As the population of the earth grew, the people decided that they would construct a great city with a tower reaching up to heaven. They began building the tower of Babel.
- C. But God was not pleased that mankind was failing to spread out and fill the earth. So he confused the languages and separated people groups.
- D. That resulted in people moving to different parts of the world.

- E. It also explains the differences we see among humans. There is only one human race/species, but differences developed due to the isolation of groups.
- F. Although the languages are confused and ethnic differences pertain, still, all humanity is one race.

Ac 17:26 [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

V. Covenants

Genesis 12:1, 4a *Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you.... So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, ...*

- A. God spoke to a man named Abram, who then became the leader of a family that followed the Lord.

Genesis 12:7 Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

- B. Abraham had a son named Isaac, and he had a son named Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons, and his family became the nation of Israel.

- C. Most of the OT is the story of Abraham's family.

1. About 70 people from Abraham's family who were living in Canaan left there and sojourned in Egypt.
2. The family was in Egypt for about 400 years and became a huge group of people, perhaps over 2 million individuals.
3. When they escaped from Egypt, God performed great signs and wonders, primarily through Moses. They crossed the Red Sea on dry ground and began a long journey through the wilderness.
4. God gave Israel his law through Moses. This law served as a kind of constitution that made this ethnic group into a nation. God constituted Israel as a nation at Mt. Sinai.

5. The nation of Israel, led by Joshua, crossed the Jordan River and began its conquest of the Promised Land. They conquered most of the land and eventually installed a series of judges and then kings.
6. Israel as a nation had significant ups and downs. After only three kings, the nation split into two with the northern kingdom becoming totally apostate and the southern kingdom swinging back and forth from faithfulness to idolatry.
7. The prophets warned Israel about its apostasy and idolatry, but the nation would not repent.
8. Because of Israel's sin and disobedience, God allowed other nations to dominate Israel—the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and eventually the Roman Empire governed Israel.
9. The prophets foretold of a coming Messiah, a savior, the servant of the Lord. He would establish a kingdom that would usher in peace, prosperity, and security.

Isaiah 9:7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever.

10. But the OT ends without a Messiah. There are many promises of a coming king and kingdom, but these prophecies are not fulfilled by the time we get to the end of the OT.

There are about 400 years between the end of the OT and the beginning of the NT. For centuries, the nation of Israel had no inspired prophet. But eventually God raised up a prophet—John the Baptist—who prepared the way for the coming of ...

VI. Christ

- A. Jesus is born in about 3-4 BC and lived for about 33 years in Israel. The Gospels tell us of remarkable things that happened when Jesus was born—a virgin gave birth, angels singing, shepherds rejoicing, and wise men worshipping.

- B. We know very little of Jesus' childhood and early life. He begins his public ministry when he was around 30 years old.
- C. He began by preaching a particular message.
Mark 1:14–15 ... Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."
- D. Jesus claimed to be the promised Messiah, the king of Israel, the Son of God that the OT prophets foretold was coming.
- E. He preached about the kingdom of God and did remarkable miracles. Many people listened to him and he became very popular.
- F. He gathered a group of disciples and traveled throughout Israel, preaching repentance and offering himself as the Messiah.
- G. But the religious leaders in Jerusalem saw Jesus as a threat to their power, so they criticized him and opposed him. They accused him of being demon possessed and of being a fraud and a phony. They tried on multiple occasions to capture Jesus, but they did not succeed for some time.
- H. Jesus' supporters hailed him as the Son of David and the king of Israel as he entered Jerusalem. But the religious leaders rejected Jesus' claim to be the king. Jesus uttered the dreadful statement, "Your house is left unto you desolate" (Mt 23:38), showing that God's program for Israel was about to end. The Jewish religious leaders hatched a conspiracy to destroy Jesus.

VII. Cross

- A. One of Jesus' disciples cooperated in a scheme to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver.
- B. The religious authorities gathered a mob to arrest Jesus in the middle of the night. After his arrest, they eventually coerce him into admitting that he claimed to be the Messiah, and for that assertion, they charged him with blasphemy.

- C. The Jews coordinated with the Roman authorities and secured Jesus' condemnation. Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, found no fault in Jesus but agreed to allow him to be crucified anyways.
- D. Jesus was nailed to a cross and suffered for our sins. The Bible teaches that Jesus was a sacrifice for sin, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Isa 53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- E. After his death, he was taken down from the cross, put into a nearby tomb, and sealed in with a large stone. A group of soldiers was stationed at the tomb to prevent any attempts to steal the body.
 - F. But on the third day, Jesus rose again. The guards fainted and awoke to find an empty tomb. The Jewish authorities had to admit that the tomb was empty.
 - G. The disciples were a dispirited and fearful group before they knew about Jesus resurrection. Jesus appeared to them and assured them that he was genuinely alive.
 - H. For 40 days, Jesus appeared to his disciples and to many others. A great number of people believed that Jesus had risen from the dead.
- Acts 1:3 ... He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*
- I. The disciples watched as Jesus ascended into heaven.

VIII. Church

- A. God's primary program from the time of Abraham right up to the resurrection was Abraham's family—the nation of Israel. Jesus had come to offer himself as their king. But since they rejected him and killed him, God set aside Israel temporarily and established the Christian church.
- B. The church began when about 3000 Jewish people in Jerusalem accepted the message of the Gospel on the Day of Pentecost. Those who believed in Jesus as the Messiah were baptized and began meeting together regularly to pray and to discuss Jesus' teaching.
- C. The church grew rapidly in Jerusalem and in nearby cities. Thousands of Jewish people believed in Jesus. The church began sending out missionaries, and people were saved and churches planted in many cities of the Roman Empire.

IX. Coming

Acts 1:11 ... *This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.*

- A. When Jesus ascended to heaven, he promised that he would return and establish a kingdom. Nobody knows when Jesus will return. It could be today; it's imminent.

John 14:2–3 *In My Father's house are many mansions; ... I go to prepare a place for you. ... I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*

1 Thessalonians 4:16–17 *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

- B. The first part of Jesus' return will be the rapture, when believers are "caught up together" to be with the Lord.

- C. After seven years of tribulation, Jesus will return to the earth with great power and glory to establish his kingdom. He'll rule the earth from Jerusalem on the throne of David. He will be the perfect ruler and his reign will bring peace, justice, and prosperity to earth.
 - D. At the end of Jesus' reign, Satan will be let loose one last time, and he'll gather an army to go to war against Jesus. But Jesus will defeat this satanic force almost immediately, and that will be the end of Satan's influence over the world.
- X. Consummation/completion
- A. After that 1000-year reign of Christ will come the final judgment.
 - B. The righteous will enjoy heavenly rewards while the wicked are punished eternally in hell.
 - C. Satan and all his followers will be cast into the lake of fire where they'll suffer torment for the rest of eternity.
 - D. God will usher in a new heavens and new earth.
 - 1. This could be a renewal of the present earth, or it could be a total renovation of the entire universe.
 - 2. Either way, believers will enjoy a perfect, Eden-like environment and total contentment and joy in the eternal state. We'll inhabit the dwelling places that Christ has prepared for us. God will give his people all things to enjoy.

These are the highpoints of the Bible's contents, the main story line. If someone were to ask you what the Bible is all about, you could rehearse these main points.

Before finishing up our survey of the entire Bible, we should consider one last item. Consider for a moment the question: What is the primary focus or the center of all of God's activity as it's revealed in the Bible? There is a lot going on in the Bible; is there a primary theme that runs throughout all of its pages? Is there a scarlet thread that connects everything together?

Most Bible students are aware of certain primary themes in the Bible, themes like the covenant, promise, God's sovereignty or holiness, God's glory, or the salvation of sinners. These are primary themes that come up repeatedly throughout Scripture. Some would say that salvation is the main theme of the Bible, or perhaps covenant or God's glory or Jesus.

I would agree with others (e.g., Rolland McCune) that God's highest and ultimate goal is to glorify himself. Since God is the highest of beings, and since God created all things ultimately by himself and for himself, there can be no greater goal than to bring glory to God. Even God himself seeks his own glory because there is no greater thing to seek.

Romans 11:36 *For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*

1Pe 4:11 *... that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

Quote: "The most primitive purpose of God is His activity to glorify himself.... God's ultimate purpose and the unifying principle of His activity is to glorify Himself by establishing a rule of loving sovereignty and fellowship with human beings in His image and dwelling with them forever."¹

That purpose is best described by the statement we find throughout the Bible: "I will be their God and they will be my people." The unifying center to God's activity in the world is God's work of redeeming a group of people from sin and dwelling with them in fellowship for all eternity. Everything in the whole Bible is somehow related to this statement: "I will be their God and they shall be my people." From creation to consummation/completion, that's what it's all about. It's all in some way or another an outworking of that ultimate purpose.

A few examples where we find this kind of language:

Lev 26:12 *I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.*

Ezek 37:27 *My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

¹ Rolland McCune, "A Unifying Center to God's Activity." DBTS.

Jer 31:33 ... *this [is] the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

Jer 32:38 *They shall be My people, and I will be their God;*

Zec 8:8 ... *They shall be My people And I will be their God, In truth and righteousness.'*

2Co 6:16 ... *As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."*

Next time you read through the Bible, take note of how many times you come across that expression—"I will be their God and they shall be my people."

What is the Bible all about? The most basic and foundational idea that the whole Bible reflects is that God desires to glorify himself by living in fellowship with his people. His ultimate goal is to save people from sin and dwell with them in eternal fellowship.

Ac 15:14 ... *God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.*

How do we enter into that relationship with God? We enter that relationship by faith in the Son of God, IX. The whole Bible reveals God's activity in bringing his people into that kind of relationship with him. And in the end, God will dwell with his people in peace and fellowship for all eternity.

Revelation 21:3 *And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God."*